

## Civil War Book Review

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### Never Surrender: Confederate Memory and Conservatism in the South Carolina Upcountry

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## Review

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**Poole, W. Scott** *Never Surrender: Confederate Memory and Conservatism in the South Carolina Upcountry*. University of Georgia Press, \$49.95, hardcover \$19.95, softcover ISBN 0807128686, hardcover 0820325082, softcover

Preserving values

The Southern Highlands and the organic society

Professor Scott Poole of the University of Charleston has written an important study of the changes in political perspective that took place among white men in upper South Carolina after the Civil War. While scholars will probably challenge some of his specific assertions, Poole's general point appears to be based on an accurate reading of the events and public mind of the time. Based primarily on the newspapers and published writings of leading political figures, this study traces an important shift in power and political dialogue that took place in the late nineteenth century in upper South Carolina.

Poole starts his study by identifying a conservative sthetic that dominated political discourse after the Civil War in the northern half of South Carolina. In a number of ways, this effort is not fully convincing. First, Poole does not provide a consistent explanation of the way counties were selected to be part of his study. At the same time, the reader is left uncertain as why these counties are distinct—other than they are not coastal counties. Equally important, the term sthetic is not clearly defined. Poole appears to use the term to cover a broad approach to intellectual and cultural life that includes, but is not limited to, intellectual history.

His definition of conservative is much clearer—belief in an organic society of established institutions and relationships. But even here, Poole's analysis is not completely convincing. While there is no question that some members of the elite were true advocates of an organic society, Poole does not demonstrate that the remainder of the society accepted the same perspective. Part of the problem

for Poole may be that he does not examine the politics of the Civil War period. In many parts of the Confederacy, the people who urged immediate secession were voted out of office between 1862 and 1864 and more moderate people put in their place. This split in the leadership ranks meant that it was difficult to construct a single conservative coalition in the aftermath of the war.

In fact, the rise of the Ku Klux Klan in the South Carolina upcountry demonstrated the limitations of conservative influence. Poole admits as much. On page 112, he writes: Some of the white conservative leaders who had administered an oath to Klan members . . . looked on somewhat helplessly at the horrors they had allowed to walk Frankensteinlike in the Carolina upcountry. Poole goes to demonstrate that the elite contained this violence, after federal troops intervened, by organizing rifle clubs under the disciplined leadership of elite leaders. These clubs acted as partisan organizations during the critical 1876 gubernatorial election and provided the impetus for the revival of Confederate memory as an uncontested good. The election of conservative Wade Hampton as governor Poole argues on page 122, embodied both the ideology of the Lost Cause and the memory of the Lost Eden, the Old South. The interpretive problem, as Poole recognizes, is that a substantial number of Hampton supporters were rabid racists who rejected Hampton's construct of a bi-racial, organic society.

In his most innovative section of the book, Poole challenges the interpretations of C. Vann Woodward, Steven Hahn, Robert McMath, and Lawrence Goodwyn. In contrast to these scholars who emphasize the economic conflicts between the elite and the struggling small farmers, Poole asserts the two groups shared much of the same sthetic. This shared creed included male independence and dominance at its core. He does not deny their differing financial interests, he maintains that the two groups were more similar than different. At the same time, Poole does do a fine job of documenting how the Bourbon leadership failed to appreciate the desperate economic challenges faced by the small farmers. Many other state and regional studies confirm that contemporary political leaders in the west and south shared this same blindness.

The last quarter of the book is devoted to the Tillman movement and the shattering of the conservative sthetic in upcountry South Carolina. Poole examines the events of the 1890s that radically reshaped the public discourse and the use of political power in South Carolina. He views Ben Tillman as the agent for bourgeoisie values, middle class and professional sensibilities, and textile

manufacturing interests. Tillman helped to fashion the 1895 South Carolina constitution to serve all of these perspectives while simultaneously disfranchising virtually all blacks and many poor whites. Poole persuasively argues that the Lost Cause was transformed from a source of pride in continued resistance to outside values to a vehicle of national reconciliation after 1898.

Poole needs to be careful about attributing these changes in political leadership and ideology to the undermining the conservatism associated with the Civil War generation. I noted the same change in political leadership between the Civil War generation and the new businessmen in the 1890s in West Virginia and the mountain counties of Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia. However, these community spokesmen had been soldiers in the Union Army and rejected the Lost Cause mythology. Despite their obvious difference in partisan and historical perspective, they were no more able to withstand the advances of the new middle class than the South Carolina conservatives. This would seem to suggest that there was some broader—probably national—trend that is reflected in South Carolina experience.

In a concluding essay, Poole calls for a greater appreciation for the contribution that the conservatives made in the South during this period. On page 200, he identifies the sources he used to define the conservative sthetic: . . . we instead see southern conservatism primarily as a function of culture and lived ethos, bodied forth in political speeches, sermons, novels, monuments, relationships among neighbors, oddities, songs, ownership of property, and public rituals. This disparate list of sources indicates an underlying problem with the book's analytical framework. Most of the materials listed above were generated by a small elite, but Poole feels constrained to see the movement as a broad one that included white farmers facing financial ruin. I do not find the evidence compelling on this point.

Despite some of the limitations noted in this review, Poole's book is an important study of a southern state in the last third of the nineteenth century. He is surely correct that the anti-Republican leadership during Reconstruction and the later Bourbon leadership were closely connected to the antebellum conservative leadership of the state. Poole also offers important insights about the important changes in ideologies and leadership that took place in the 1890s. These contributions are significant additions to the growing debate about the South after the Civil War. The profession can thank Poole for offering a new perspective on these still contested time periods.

*Gordon B. McKinney is Professor of History and Director of the Appalachian Center at Berea College. His book Zeb Vance: North Carolina's Civil War Governor and Gilded Age Political Leader will be published by the University of North Carolina Press in August 2004.*